



THE PRASNOTTARA:

(BEING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON TOPICS OF INTEREST TO THEOSOPHISTS.)

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Write on one side of the paper only, and address all communications to the Editor:—BERTRAM KEIGHTLEY, Gen. Sec., Adyar, Madras.

For paragraphs under the word "Ans." the Editor is personally responsible.
September, 1891.

QUESTION XVI—(Resumed).

It has been stated that, for ordinary men, 1000 years is the minimum duration of the stay of a Jiva in Devachan. What is the teaching of the Shastras on this point, and what are the analogies or arguments for and against the above statement?

Q.—I do not think A. N. S. is quite correct; nor do I think that the assertion that the time of rest is proportionate to the power of Karma, is unscientific or opposed to recent theosophic teachings. But time is not so important in the higher lokas as a certain train of thoughts, pleasurable or otherwise.

Leaving Preta Deha, the ego passes on either to Pitri Loka or Deva Loka, if not to Naraka; in the first it remains "as in

a dream"; in Deva Loka it has a full conscious existence. It is not, as I have said, time that exhausts the Karma, but the *intensity of thought vibration*. The ego's sufferings in Naraka, or its enjoyments in Pitri Loka or Deva Loka are for a terminable period, at the end of which it must be born again.

The minimum of 1000 years is, I think, for ordinary men; in numerous exceptional cases it is for less favored egos only a few passing moments to satisfy Karma. "The strong only perspire while the weak have to sleep" is a significant Indian proverb, those that have the *will and capacity* to work would be called to sorrow; it cannot be otherwise.

Extracted from a letter of Mahatma. K.H.

The moral and spiritual activities find their sphere of effects in Devachan. For example, the views, physical attractions, etc., of a Philosopher may result in the birth of a new Philosopher, a King, Merchant, a rich Epicurean or any other personality whose make-up was inevitable from the preponderating proclivities of the being in the next preceding birth. Bacon, for instance, might appear in his next incarnation as a greedy money-getter with extraordinary mental capacities. But the moral and spiritual qualities of the previous Bacon would also have to find a field in which their energies could expand themselves. Devachan is such a field, hence—all the great plans of moral reform, of intellectual and spiritual research into abstract principles of nature, all the divine aspirations would in Devachan come to fruition, and the abstract entity, previously known as the great chancellor, would occupy itself in this inner world of its own preparation, living, if not quite what one would call a conscious existence, at least a dream of such realistic vividness that none of the life realities ever could match it. And this dream lasts until Karma is satisfied in that direction, till the ripple of force reaches the edge of its cyclic basin, and the being moves into the next area of causes. This it may find in the same world as before, or another, according to his or her stage of progression through the necessary Rings and Rounds of Human development.....

No, there are no clocks, no time-pieces in Devachan, though the whole Cosmos is a gigantic chronometer in every sense. I may remind you also that *time is something created by ourselves*; that while one short second of intense agony may appear, even on earth, as an eternity to one man, to another more fortunate, hours, days and sometimes whole years may seem to flit like one short moment. Time is not a predicate conception, and can therefore neither be proved nor analyzed according to the methods of superficial philosophy, and unless we learn to counteract the negative results of that method of drawing our conclusions as agreeably to the so-called system of pure reason and to distinguish between the matter and the form of our knowledge of sensible objects, we can never arrive at correct, definite conclusions.....

The stay in Devachan is proportioned to the unfinished psychic impulses originating in earth life. Those whose attractions were preponderatingly material will sooner be drawn back into re-birth by the force of Tanha.

QUESTION XXII—(Continued).

Do people enjoy or suffer the consequences of all good and bad Karma, or is there a set-off of the one against the other?

S.P.—As an ego has to be in bondage of births and deaths while he is bound by his desire to pleasures and pains of this world; and as the tendency of every desire is caused by the effects of his *Sanchit Karma*; it seems reasonable to suppose that there is no set-off of any Karma, but that an ego will have to enjoy or suffer the result of his good or bad Karma in succession and in proportion to its occurrence. Yet it is probable that if an ego has a tendency towards good Karma in his present birth, his good Karma may postpone the effects of his bad *Sanchit Karma* for a time. Had there been a set-off of one Karma against another, there would have been left no chance for an ego to better its Karma in the current life. Suppose a man has a large amount of bad *Sanchit Karma* and but little good, he would not have the chance of doing

good deeds while his good *Sanchit Karma* had been used as a set-off, and he had to reap the harvest of bad Karma only. On the other hand, if he is to enjoy or suffer the consequences of good or bad *Sanchit Karmas* in succession, there is an open field for him to better himself when he is under the sun-shine of good Karma which, if helped by good society, will tend to postpone the effects of bad Karma till the continuance of the present good one is in progression and *vice versa*.

B.K.—Two points of special importance are brought up by this question. First, that the Law of Karma is regarded by many purely as a rewarding or punishing agency. This is wrong. The Law of Karma simply brings home to *every* individual the *actual consequences* of his actions (on any plane). These consequences then produce pain or pleasure for him, according as the action which produces them was or was not in harmony with nature. There is thus nothing whatever in Karma resembling a personal, over-ruling God or Judge, meting out reward or punishment according to an arbitrary code. Hence, there can be no "setting-off" of good Karma against bad. It must be remembered, however, that our Karma or actions are correlated and interwoven amongst themselves, and therefore the forces generated by them combine together and re-act upon each other in producing their effects, just as do the physical forces of this plane. Again, in the very same action are combined forces on different planes, which may be of widely different characters. For instance, suppose a man gives largely in charity and does much good, but actuated by a selfish motive—the desire, say, to obtain some position of dignity, or an honorific title. Now his charity does good, and hence its effects will be of the same character; but his motive is selfish, *i. e.*, bad, as not being in harmony with nature. Hence, the final outcome will be the resultant of the combined action of these forces, and may therefore be a *bad* force, and thus in a manner the good and bad karmic forces are "set-off" against each other. But this is only possible in some such way as that described. Secondly, we often make a very great mistake in importing

these ideas of "good" and "bad" into the conception of Karma, which is a *Universal Law*, while "good" and "bad" in their common acceptation are relative to the individual, his surroundings and his epoch. Further, the confusion becomes worse, when the ideas of "pain" and "pleasure" are mixed up with those of "good" and "bad," as many do who think of good Karma as bringing pleasure, while bad Karma causes pain. All these ideas must be put aside if we wish to form a correct notion of Karma.

A.S.—If we are to understand Karma in its true meaning it must be evident to us that there can be no set-off of good and bad Karma in the sense of the question. There has always been a tendency in the Society, and there is still for the matter of that, to regard Karma as a retributive agency. Morally speaking it is such but in its actual working on the various planes of being it is simply a law of equilibrium or adjustment. It is perhaps somewhat dangerous to refer to Karma as the law of justice, for this is course applying to it an attribute. H. P. B. speaks somewhere in the *Secret Doctrine* of Karma as a "Synonym of Providence minus design, good or any finite attribute" and she then goes on to insist on the importance of regarding Karma as attributeless. People strictly speaking cannot be said to "suffer the consequences of their bad deeds" they simply receive the natural result of their own actions, the result of those actions *per se* and not on account of their goodness or badness, hence it will be evident that good actions cannot be set-off against bad.

QUESTION XXV.—(Continued).

How can free-will be explained in the light of Karmic theory?

P.B.N.—Our Karma sketches out the outline of our future life for us but we can fill in the details. Our birth in a particular family is the result of our Karma but it is in us either to remain in that condition or to change it by the force of our will, power, and action. In fact our lives are the resultants of two forces Karma and our free-will.

K.M.—There is no free-will properly so called; what we are pleased to call free-will is but the result of our previous Karma; we are *free* only relatively as our Karma has allowed us to be so; freedom is and must always be the result of Gnanam. Every Jiva is Buddha and it is our constant effort to be free or *Mukta*; to be free in the true sense of the word one must first be passionless or *Shanta*; for Shanti or Blissful Peace is the apex of the triangle of Bhavam the two lower angles of which are joy and sorrow—Sukham and Dukkham. Now if we have no free-will, it may be asked, how can we be responsible for our acts? The answer is simply—"why not? You have *yourself* become what you are!" What is called Purushakara in our Shastras (Yoga Vashista for instance) is not what is generally understood by free-will; conscience is a nearer approach, though still very far; the word has no equivalent in English, but must not on that account be confounded with free-will.

As regards relative freedom as the result of Gnanam, there is nothing in the Karmic theory that is against it.

In one of its aspects Purushakara is the inherent natural tendency of the Jiva to be free from the bonds of Maya, to regain, with the help of Gnanam, its own natural state,—in another aspect it is *Ichcha Sakti*, a part of the cosmic Will. The light shines notwithstanding its red and black reflectors, but that is not what is commonly called free-will, but often the result of *Avidya* and *Ahankaram*.

K.—To answer this question adequately a volume would be necessary and much study and thought on the part of the reader. Still a most valuable sketch of the way in which "free-will" comes into the scheme of things will be found in an admirable article by Annie Besant in the *Path* for July 1891, which will shortly be republished as a Branch-Work Paper. It must suffice here to say briefly that free-will as force is, on each plane, the representative or reflection of the unconditioned or *Atma*, while its operation is limited in proportion as each plane is nearer to, or further from, that unconditioned state.

Karma thus creates the conditions under which free-will acts; but as on every plane this *potentially* absolute and unconditioned element exists, it is impossible to predict with *absolute* certainty, in the case of any individual, what he will do under given circumstances, though in the case of ordinary men the prediction may possess such a high degree of probability as to amount to *practical* certainty. As an illustration, it may be mentioned that not even a Master knows with perfect certainty whether his *chela* will fail or will succeed in the trials of initiation.

QUESTION XXVI.—(Continued).

Is good unselfish motive a pre-requisite for the attainment of Occult knowledge. If it is, how do Black Magicians obtain their powers?

Ans.—If the term “occult knowledge” is to be taken in its broad sense of “hidden or secret knowledge,” then motive cannot be said to be a pre-requisite at all, as is proved by the existence of Black Magicians. But taking the term in its more technical sense as the equivalent of the Sanscrit “Gupta Vidya,” then “good,” that is unselfish motive, is absolutely an indispensable pre-requisite from the very nature of the case. For Gupta Vidya implies the *realisation* of the unity of all that is, and the corresponding expansion of the field of individual consciousness, i. e., the passing beyond, the transcending of the limitations of the finite self. Every step in advance is therefore towards more and more perfect unselfishness, which of course pre-supposes of necessity the corresponding motive. This is illustrated by the reply to the last part of the question, taking the term “Black Magicians” to mean the mightiest Dugpas, “Sataus in human form” as they have been called.

As stated by H. P. B. in the *Voice of the Silence*, the last and final test of the almost perfected occultist is his actual passage into, or attainment of, Nirvana. If he is truly “perfect,” he will renounce his well-earned reward for the sake of

helping suffering humanity, for how *can* he accept rest, peace and bliss for himself, while knowing that others suffer, if indeed he be "perfect," i. e., absolutely "unselfish" ?

Hence if he accepts Nirvana he has "failed" in this last and supreme trial, failed because in the very deepest root of his nature there still remains a taint, a germ of "selfishness." Now, according to the esoteric teachings, *all* beings, however high the Nirvana they may have attained, *must*, at some time in the infinite future, re-emerge into manifestation and activity in some future Manvantara, Kalpa, or Universe. The Occultist, then, who has thus "failed" in the supreme trial, and accepted Nirvana for himself because of the unconquered germ of selfishness in him, will re-emerge in the future endowed with all the knowledge and power he had gained, but with a taint of selfishness in his deepest nature. This will gradually work itself outwards, plane after plane, till at last he becomes a being endowed with great and enormous power but utterly selfish, in other words a Black Magician. As to what follows, we have no knowledge ; but it must not be forgotten that a fresh and true conquest of self still remains possible, and *may be* successfully entered upon at almost any stage of the downward career, if once the root of evil is recognised and realised as such.

S.V.E.—Good and unselfish motive is without doubt a prerequisite for the attainment of occult knowledge in the true sense of the word. It is however by no means a necessity in the acquirement of what are ordinarily called "occult powers." Says H. P. Blavatsky in an article in *Lucifer* for April 1888—"It is *comparatively* easy to learn the trick of spells and the methods of using the subtler, but still, material forces of physical nature ; the powers of the animal soul in man are soon awakened ; the forces which his love, his hate, his passion, can call into operation are readily developed. But this is Black Magic—*Sorcery*. For it is the motive and *the motive alone* which makes any exercise of power become black, malignant or white, beneficent Magic."

It is thus clearly shown that unselfishness of motive is in itself a *sine quâ non* for true occult knowledge. For what is practical occultism but the attuning of one's mind with the universal mind, an expansion of consciousness into universal consciousness and a consequent perception and realisation of the non-separateness of all humanity? The black magician on the other hand living only for the gratification of selfish desires concentrating his consciousness on himself instead of expanding it finally reaches the end of his tether, and undergoes the natural fate of those who work against natural laws instead of with them.

QUESTION XXVII.—(Continued.)

Is it advisable to perform acts of indiscriminate charity?

S.V.E.—D. W.'s answer covers most of the ground. The true meaning of charity is love or perhaps better still compassion. True compassion or love should be tempered by reason and not be the mere outcome of emotionalism. In performing an act of charity the ultimate result of such act, as far as one is able to see it, should be considered and an act of alms-giving without this precaution is frequently of more harm than good. The majority of mankind tied down as they are by surroundings have only limited opportunities for performing definite acts of charity. This being so, it is the duty of every man to make the best use of his opportunities in this direction and to calculate for the best result to his labours.

It may be useful to note that "the theosophical ideas of charity mean *personal* exertion for others; *personal* mercy and kindness; *personal* interest in the welfare of those who suffer; *personal* sympathy, forethought and assistance in their troubles or needs."

S.E.G.—According to Dharmasastras, none but a Brahmin can receive gifts of any kind except food, which can be indiscriminately given to any one. The reason is apparent when we consider that the duty of a Brahmin is to teach spiritual knowledge, and in return to be sufficiently provided for by the several classes. Indeed the receiving of gifts (*dána*)

was considered one of his six duties (*shat karma*). Even in the case of a Brahmin the purposes for which he would utilize the gift (of any kind whatever) should be first considered, and this is previously ascertained by questioning him as to his name, clan, and other details, which should be done as a rule. These enquiries enable one, it is said, to find out whether he is a proper recipient for the gift, or charity to be given. There are different degrees of recipients varying according to their spiritual advancement, and the Karma generated by an act of charity depends on the recipient's spiritual advancement, and the purposes for which he utilizes the gift. If the gift is utilized for bad purposes the giver will suffer from the effects of bad Karma only if he knew beforehand that such would be the case, and is still unmindful of it; but otherwise not. A Brahmin alone has both the power of giving and receiving, while all other classes can only give: and a Brahmin, as I said above, can only perform charity with respect to a Brahmin, except of course with regard to food which can be indiscriminately given to any one irrespective of caste, creed, or colour preference being given to a Brahmin, when there are candidates from the various classes.

When a Brahmin gives charity in respect of any other thing but food, to any other than a Brahmin, care should be taken to see that he gets a return for it, in some form or other, no matter however trivial. For a detailed explanation of the ideas above given, I would refer the reader to Yáguavalkya and Parasara's Smrities. It should also be explained that the Sanskrit word *dána* means both gift, and charity.

QUESTION XXVIII.

Is celibacy essential for the observance and successful practice of Yoga? If not, to what degree does a life of celibacy afford facilities for success in Yoga?

P.B.N.—“Strict chastity is simply enjoined on those who desire a certain spiritual development, the road to which includes the getting rid of the whole personality as such and the

realisation of the higher individuality" (*vide* Theosophist, February 1886). This absolutely chaste life is for those who desire a very high grade in *Yoga* practices. But a married life is consistent with *Yoga* practices as will be shown by many persons who have been both house-holders and Yogis, of whom we read in the Puranas. But with such a man that which is a source of enjoyment with us, was only a duty to be performed at fixed intervals when progeny was desired ; because the very nerve substance destroyed in sexual intercourse forms part of the matrix in which the Yogic powers have to be developed.

The mind of a would-be Yogi must be perfectly and permanently in a state of serenity. All passions, *e. g.*, pride, hate, malice, envy, anger, greed, and craving for worldly advantages, must have departed from it. A celibate life will afford facilities to a student of *Yoga* in gaining this state.

W.L.T.—I should consider that celibacy was an essential for the practice of *Yoga* in the first place on the general ground that "no man can serve two masters." Success in Yogic development entails a complete sacrifice of everything to the end in view. The mind has to be kept perfectly calm and undisturbed and this bring us to the physiological side of the question. Of all actions affecting the human body and mind, sexual action is the most powerful by reason of the intensity of the vibrations set up. In sexual intercourse the length of breath is said to be 48.75 inches. There is an important hint given in the *Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II., p. 296. "During human life the greatest impediment in the way of spiritual development and especially to the acquirement of *Yoga* powers is the activity of our physiological senses. Sexual action being closely connected by interaction with the spinal cord to the gray matter of the brain it is useless to give any longer explanation."

X.—Besides the foregoing, there are two very powerful reasons why a life of celibacy—by which is to be understood a life of strict chastity, both physical and more especially mental—should be *essential* to any considerable degree of success in

occultism and favourable to its attainment in proportion as it can be followed without a breach of obligation. These reasons are :—First there is only one power or force in all the universe, manifesting in myriad forms, and this force is the creative power in Nature, which power is essentially identical with that expended by man in sexual intercourse. Now each organism has only a definite amount of this universal creative power to expend in all its work, and if a man, expends his share in one direction, he has so much less to use for other purposes. Further the main idea of yoga or Occultism is that a man should create himself over again on higher planes and in the form of nobler ideals, while the attainment of all yogic powers, faculties and knowledge obviously depends on the creation by the student of the necessary organs, &c. for their reception and manifestation. Hence the would-be Occultist who spends his creative power on the physical plane has actually lessened and wasted the very power on which he depends for his progress.

Second.—Unless rigorously confined to its natural purpose, the begetting of offspring, the gratification of sexual passion involves the misuse of the highest, universal power for the most purely selfish of purposes. And it is needless to point out in detail how completely this is opposed to the very essence of true Occultism.

QUESTION XXIX.

Had the ancient Egyptians any occult reason for embalming their dead?

P.N.R.—In answering this question the first point that should be remembered is with reference to the religion of Egypt and to the various grades of Priests who were employed in the temples. The Priests of Isis are said to have been the only true initiates and their teachings were of course kept secret. Following these were the half-veiled teachings of the Priests of the Outer Temple and finally the popular religion of the large mass of the ignorant and profane. Now though it is very probable that the real initiates had some definite and occult reason

for the preserving of their dead bodies it is equally probable that the greater part of the half-initiated priests and the whole of the general public had no occult reason at all, but simply copied their superiors. Their only apparent reason seems to have been to preserve the identity of the physical atoms. As regards the Initiates, a reason that has been suggested for their custom is the preservation of the Astral Body. For what purpose, I have not been able to discover. Embalming and the preservation of the Astral Body appear to be entirely contrary to our present occult teachings as to the best means for disposing of the body at death, for we learn that cremation is the only efficient way of destroying the astral and of preventing any post-mortem accidents or misfortunes.

S.H.E.—The custom of embalming the dead was undoubtedly established in Egypt in the very earliest times—before the dawn of authentic history and most likely under the guidance of the King-Initiates mentioned by H. P. B. in the *Secret Doctrine*, who founded the religion and polity of which such magnificent relics have come down to us.

Their reason—or at any rate one reason—for practising embalming, was to render it easier for the ego which had quitted that body to recover in its next incarnation the memory and knowledge of its last birth. This view is confirmed by the fact that in the early times of Egyptian history, only Kings, High Priests and very important personages were thus embalmed, and these “leaders of men” were precisely the more or less fully initiated occultists of the nation.

The way in which embalming facilitated the ego’s recovering its former knowledge, may perhaps be conceived of thus. Our every thought, aspiration, &c., impress themselves upon the substance and the structure of the physical brain, and these impressions remain stamped upon the atoms and molecules even after death and the complete disintegration of the body. Now in each successive birth, the reincarnating ego gathers up on all planes a certain quantity of the actual matter that composed its last body, and the quantity thus brought

together again is larger in proportion as the time elapsed between the two births is smaller. It is owing to this return of brain-matter from our previous births into our present organism that we occasionally have glimpses and flashes of memory concerning those births, for the impressions stamped in those births on our brains tend to be revived when the matter bearing them returns to form a new vehicle for the same ego. This is also the reason why those who reincarnate immediately, instead of spending a long period in Devachan, recover so much more easily the knowledge they formerly possessed, and even recall the events of those existences.

To return to the embalming of the body. When that process was scientifically carried out according to the processes of occult physics, it had the effect of keeping together with the numified body the subtler matter on which the knowledge &c. of the man had been impressed and preventing it from entering into fresh combinations, thus blurring the impressions stamped by the deceased with those impressed by other entities into whose organisms it might be taken up. Thus when the ego, whose body was properly embalmed came to reincarnate, it would find awaiting it a store of all the best elements from its old body which it would naturally attract round itself to form its new one, thus rendering easy the recovery on this physical plane of the knowledge possessed by the man in his last birth, which otherwise might have lain latent and unavailable within the ego itself.

QUESTION XXX.

Is it possible by the exercise of will-power to prevent desires or thoughts arising in the animal nature from entering the mind and tainting the thoughts and aspirations? If so, what is the theory of this action?

G.N.—A large amount of desire has always seemed to me to be the desire of the physical body. We know from physical science that the visible material frame is always renewing its particles. If the aspirant abstains from the gratification of

desires he will after a time reach a point when the particles which have composed the man of vice, will have departed. At the same time the disuse of such functions will tend to obstruct the entry, in place of the old particles, of new particles having a tendency to repeat the said acts.

So much for physical desires and tendencies. In the case of the subtler or mental desires it has been suggested that a simple resistance alone is not sufficient, the mind should be actively turned in the opposite direction and firmly fixed on the contemplation of some lofty thought or ideal. After a time the mind will of itself turn upwards without effort, and it will become incapable of being influenced by desire.

F. A.—We all know by experience how, when the attention is entirely absorbed in any subject, *e. g.* an interesting book, the mind ceases to notice external things, sounds, or even such feelings as pain and discomfort. By constantly and ceaseless training the power of attention and using our will-power, we can acquire the habit of absorbing our minds in any subject at will. Once this habit acquired and constantly practised, the desires, passions and promptings which arise from our animal nature fail to find entrance into the mind, except when our attention is wandering and the mind resting unoccupied with any special topic. Even at such moments, directly such a thought or desire arises and is perceived by the mind, we can put it out of existence, *so far as we are concerned*, by instantly fixing our attention and absorbing the mind in some other subject. This is the method of starving out the lower nature, by cutting off from it all supplies of mental energy.

With regard to the theory of this action, regarded as a problem in occult physics, it would take too long to go into the question here in detail. Suffice it to say that each centre of energy in man on all the seven planes of his being, has its special representative in some centre, correlated with it, on *each* plane of the seven. Thus, all the six higher principles, with their sub-principles and centres of energy from the highest to the lowest, are represented on the physical plane by centres in

the human body. The real man, the Thinker dwells in one or other of these centres according to where his attention and interest is centered for the moment. Thus he can fix himself in the bodily centres corresponding to the higher spiritual nature, and by keeping his attention fixed, cut off the communication with lower ones as pointed out in the question.

NOTICE.

Questions to be dealt with in the next and subsequent issues of "PRASNOTTARA." Answers should be sent in as soon as possible.

What is the efficacy of the Shraddha ceremonies, as practised on the death of a person, as well as performed annually on his account? Why is the second half of the month of Bhádrapada (or according to some, the same half is taken as the first of Ashwin) preferred for the performance of this ceremony?

2. *Has "Pinda" any connection with the salvation of the persons for whom it is offered. If so, what has the immaterial spirit to do with the material substances used in this ceremony: Cannot this ceremony be well substituted by anything else, if so, what?*

3. *What is to be understood by the term "Intuition," and what are the best means for developing the Intuitive faculties?*

4. *What is the "third eye" or eye of Siva? Is it the power of ordinary clairvoyance or that of spiritual intuition?*

5. *Why are Hindus warned against sleeping with their feet either to the East or South?*

6. *What is Mukti? Will a person who has once attained it be reborn again in the next Kalpa (i. e. after Pralaya total destruction)?*

7. *Is childlessness the result of one's bad Karma?*

8. *Why should people fast during Solar and lunar eclipses?*

During the absence of the General Secretary but few questions and answers have been sent in for the "PRASNOTTARA" and the matter in hand is practically exhausted.

Members are earnestly requested to send in both questions and answers as freely as possible in order to make the "PRASNOTTARA" of general interest to members of the Indian Section.